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Progress and Challenges of Combating Climate Change in Indonesia: An Interview with Prof. Rachmat Witoelar, the President's Special Envoy for Climate Change

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Professor Rachmat Witoelar, former Minister of the Environment in Indonesia, heads the National Council on Climate Change in Indonesia (DNPI) and Indonesia's delegations to negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This interview was conducted during the most recent UNFCCC negotiations in Bonn in May 2012 and contains references to specific agreements in that process. As the Kyoto Protocol – which includes binding targets for countries in the Global North (so-called Annex 1 countries) – is drawing to an end, negotiations revolve around a new protocol, but last year's high level talks in Durban only came up with a fairly vague result – the Durban Platform – without binding emission reduction targets. In this context, Indonesia's announcement to pursue its own unilateral reduction target is significant. The progress and challenges of achieving this target are the focus of the following interview.

Professor Rachmat Witoelar, ehemaliger Umweltminister Indonesiens, leitet sowohl den Nationalen Rat für Klimawandel in Indonesien (DNPI) als auch Indonesiens Delegation zu den Verhandlungen im Rahmen der United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Dieses Interview wurde während der letzten UNFCCC Verhandlungen in Bonn im Mai 2012 durchgeführt und bezieht sich auf spezifische Vereinbarungen im Rahmen dieses Verhandlungsprozesses. Aufgrund des baldigen Auslaufens des Kyoto-Protokolls, welches verpflichtende Ziele für die Länder des globalen Nordens (sogenannte Annex 1 Länder) beinhaltet, konzentrieren sich die laufenden Verhandlungen auf ein neues Protokoll. Die Gespräche auf höchster Ebene, die vergangenes Jahr in Durban geführt wurden brachten mit der Schöpfung der Durban Platform jedoch nur ein vages Ergebnis hervor und legten keine bindenden Emissionsreduktionsziele fest. In diesem Kontext ist Indonesiens Ankündigung, unilateral eigene Reduktionsziele festzulegen, bedeutend. Die Fortschritte und Herausforderungen, dieses Ziel zu erreichen, stehen im Fokus des folgenden Interviews.

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2 Irendra Radjawali is trained as a civil engineer, urban and regional planner at the Institute of Technology Bandung, Indonesia and as a geographer at the University of Bremen, Germany. He is a researcher at the Institute of Oriental and Asian Studies, University of Bonn, Germany with focus on the political-ecology analysis of ecosystem change, especially on water resources.

TILL PLITSCHKA: I would like to start with the famous speech that President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono gave in September 2009 in Pittsburgh, USA, in which he committed Indonesia to unilaterally cut greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 26 percent and up to 41 percent with international support. So what has Indonesia done to fulfil this commitment?

RACHMAT WITOELAR: I would like to divide Indonesia's efforts into two key areas: first, institutional and second, operational. At the institutional level, there are laws and rules that have been passed to ensure that emissions can be mitigated, like preventing forest degradation through REDD³, and also rules to empower the government to punish those who transgress REDD. A key piece of legislation is the Presidential Decree No. 61/2011 which outlines who does what and when. This decree specifies the forestry sector (i.e. Land Use and Land Use Change and Forestry – LULUCF) as responsible for 67 percent of the total emission reduction target of 26 percent. The coordinating meetings with the governors and the district heads (*bupati*) are another key initiative at the institutional level. The central government can give directions but the regional governments are the executors. Unfortunately, the law which allows the *bupati* to issue permits (e.g. for timber, plantation or mining concessions) has been proven to be damaging to the environment. The central government can ask the heads of regional governments to stop issuing permits, but there has been some 'resistance' against this in the name of decentralisation. There have been constant 'legal wars' going on related to this issue in Indonesia. I'm proud to say that the environmental concerns are winning, and the district heads realise that this is good, so they don't issue as many permits as they used to. In Samarinda⁴ there are 300 permits for mining, I don't know where they will mine. Of course, the motivation of these *bupati* is the money from the concessions, but this is very damaging for the environment. The Law No. 32 on the Environment says that the punishment for abusing the regulation (on concessions) is not in the form of a fine but is actually imprisonment. If it's only a fine, then the punishment might not be effective enough as they will obtain even more money with the permit than what they will be fined. These are the efforts to move forward and to fulfil the commitment of a 26 percent emission cut.

PLITSCHKA: What about the operational level?

WITOELAR: At the operational level, first, the government, through the Ministry of Forestry, is recovering and replanting millions of trees, in fact billions of trees a year. Second, the private sector is encouraged to use their CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) for greening and planting trees. A third effort is the initiatives of local organisations and the local population. For example, the *Association of the Ladies of the Ministers* has been planting half a million trees per year, a lot of trees. So the men should do more! In the past, all these efforts have been surrounded by cynicism, but now we are sure that it has been done as it is checked by

3 The acronym REDD refers to *Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation* and is a UN programme that aims to offer incentives for countries in the Global South to reduce emissions from deforestation by creating financial values for the forest carbon stocks. (ASEAS explanatory note)

4 Samarinda is the capital of East Kalimantan, one of four provinces of the Indonesian part of the island of Borneo. (ASEAS explanatory note)

satellite mapping. However, due to the extent of the damage and the size of the country, it takes time to get everything recovered, so I'm pleased that we're going to meet the target of a 26 percent GHG emission reduction by 2020, and we're going to surpass it. I was part of the decision at that time, and the number we suggested to the President was decided on after careful deliberation. So the 26 percent are, to my knowledge, feasible and quite easy to achieve because the emissions are due to the carelessness of doing things and because of the waste, so we need to economise more. So if we just cut down on those two aspects, we would already cut down 7 to 8 percent, and the major part of it is the deforestation and illegal loggers which account for up to 40 percent of everything. So if we focus on this sector and if we cut down on that we can already achieve 30 to 40 percent, going beyond our commitment of 26 percent.

PLITSCHKA: So which sector is Indonesia's main focus to cut emissions?

WITOELAR: Better governance in terms of regulating the forestry sector.

PLITSCHKA: So forestry, not power generation like coal-fired power plants?

WITOELAR: No, I'm aware of the bad consequences of using coal for power generation but according to the statistics, the forestry sector has been polluting up to 67 percent of all emissions.

PLITSCHKA: That's why you focus your emission cutting on the forestry sector?

WITOELAR: Yes, but also the other sectors such as traffic, land use, and so forth. In all, there are 70 concrete projects that are being run under the Presidential Decree mentioned above. In this sense, the target of 26 percent is not a guess, we are not guessing. It's calculated.

PLITSCHKA: I ask this because Indonesia has a big source of geothermal energy and within the UNFCCC framework there's the component of technology transfer, so you are not planning to go down that road of promoting renewable energy instead of cutting the emissions from forestry?

WITOELAR: Of course we are going that way, but it can't be done in the initial phase. Our studies say that it takes around six years to start such geothermal installation. We want to do it from year 1. Year 1 focuses on stopping logging, year 2 focuses on starting planting, year 3 is to cut down on waste and increase efficiency, and the next year to start developing renewable energies. Up to 2012, we are keen on converting kerosene to gas, so that people use little gas stoves for cooking instead of kerosene. So this is year 4 and year 5, in year 6 we will start to exploit geothermal energy. So if we start in 2012, we are convinced that we'll pass the target of 26 percent emission reduction as promised.

PLITSCHKA: But the immediate focus is forestry?

WITOELAR: Yes, because it's the most significant sector for GHG emissions and we have to catch the actors and put them in jail. We have our jails full of them. Also, we promote re-planting. This will be done from year 1 to year 3. We have a very precise plan to reach the commitment.

IRENDRA RADJAWALI: What about REDD?

WITOELAR: REDD is supplementary and a good approach to compensate our efforts to save the trees, and we are not fighting the livelihood of the people living in the forest. We appreciate the indigenous people and support them in strengthening their capacity to live there without destroying the environment. We also have the two years moratorium on logging, and REDD is supporting the moratorium. Indonesia is in favour of putting REDD into practice, but this meeting's result is lower than the one in Durban, I don't know why. Two Indonesian delegates are fighting to increase the strength of the dictum, but there are some objections from other countries.

PLITSCHKA: When we are talking about REDD, what should a working REDD mechanism look like for Indonesia? How could it work?

WITOELAR: First, we have to have a clear map to delineate where it applies. Second, we have to have a clear indication of who lives in that area. Third, we are talking about REDD++, where those pluses mean the sustainability of the people who live there, they can plant and cut wood as long as they use the right plot of the land. We also have the demonstration/pilot projects run by ourselves with support from interested parties like Australia and Norway in certain areas. We have those parties competing for the best practice of REDD++ implementation. We also established the so-called 'green provinces' – the provinces that are able to successfully implement REDD++. The winner this year is East Kalimantan province, where those big mining (coal) companies are located. The governor of East Kalimantan, Awang Faroukh, appreciates this initiative and he totally understands that we have to stop doing things that are detrimental to the environment. Of course, the economy slows down a bit, but that's the price of clean air.

RADJAWALI: In the context of REDD and mapping, how do you think it should be connected to the spatial planning process?

WITOELAR: Actually, spatial planning comes after that map. We have problems with mapping because we have so many different maps. So Indonesia has the initiative to establish the *One Map Project*. It is supported by the US through the *U.S.-Indonesia Comprehensive Partnership* and executed by LAPAN (Indonesian Space Agency) and BAPPENAS (Indonesian Land Agency) among others. This map is going to be the base map of Indonesia and is going to be legalised by parliament. A good spatial system is very important.

PLITSCHKA: So you have the idea of REDD on one side and on the other side you have the national development strategy that includes for example oil palm plantations. How can you combine these two?

WITOELAR: If they follow the rules strictly, there won't be any conflict with the REDD scheme. By law, a certain amount of oil palm concessions should be employed for the welfare of the region at the provincial level. Some 20 percent of the concessions should be dedicated to the health of the region. The second thing is that those plantations have often been responsible for related disasters such as forest fires. So, if the oil palm plantations want to expand their area, they have to do it appropriately and not by burning as the smoke goes to Singapore and Malaysia. However, problems exist on the ground, for example that those companies 'buy' some local people to burn the forest, as they try to avoid responsibility. Also, previously, the corrupt government officials accepted some bribes from these companies to insure them against prosecution for their law breaking activities. However, I hope and am sure that now the high rank government officials won't easily take such bribes.

First of all, we delineate the land that is going to be allocated for oil palm plantation. Oil palm has the characteristic of destroying the environment, but it can be offset by doing other things, because there is also a lot of money there. So they have to make sure that they replant trees and also they don't go to the area where the forest is protected, it's very sensitive in Central Kalimantan and Riau province. The punishment on breaking the law is imprisonment. So law enforcement is important, the government can't just forbid doing this or that, we also need to enforce the law. At present, a combination of both is seen as effective. The government can't do it alone, the government also needs to work with NGOs, be it national or international ones. When I served as Minister of the Environment, I was personally very close with some NGOs like Greenpeace, Conservation International, etc. Oil palm plantations need to be sustained but with strict regulation, especially on its compliance with the environmental protection and climate change mitigation. In this context, I suggest the ministries to open the space for discussion with stakeholders and discuss the data to assess the oil palm plantations, it's data vs. data. Some data are developed by those who don't want those industries to prosper. I'm not pointing fingers but it's a war for markets. If we can't sustain our markets somebody else will get the markets. So I'm in favour of sustaining our markets and pointing out that those plantations outside Indonesia are way worse than the ones in Indonesia. To be fair, if there's an embargo, then embargo everything, that's fair! Don't only embargo Indonesia.

The second thing I want to mention: I take the position that we should forbid foreign nationals to hold permits for plantations. Many of our plantations are owned by Singaporeans and Malaysians. I'm not accusing them but don't blame Indonesia alone, as in Malaysia (Sabah, Sarawak) there are also lots of plantations. When I served as Minister of the Environment, I had access to meteorological maps showing the wind flows and the wind was turbulent, meaning that smoke in Malaysia came from the plantations in Sarawak and not from Indonesia. This is a technological war. My point is, don't point fingers at anyone because maybe you are wrong.

RADJAWALI: What is Indonesia's main objective during the current negotiations in Bonn?

WITOELAR: Ensuring that the *Bali Road Map* (BRM) and the Durban Platform will be realised. BRM has been inspected five times from COP 13 in 2007 to COP 17⁵ in 2011 and was the foundation of all the arguments in the meetings. The words "to execute BRM" are always there. However, as it is not a political entity, it is not easy. 1B1 and 1B2⁶ are not accepted by some parties. Also the CBDR (*Common but Differentiated Responsibilities*) is refused by the same parties [i.e. the United States], and the US doesn't want the Kyoto Protocol and BRM. I respect that, it shows their position. In that respect, we also want to ensure that the Durban Platform works, but they [the United States] don't want that either. At this moment, I'm unhappy because there's no real progress, only small progress.

In Durban, I was part of the Ministers' informal negotiation. All the countries that were suspected by the US of not complying with the agreement - like India or China - agreed on cutting back on emissions to a greater degree than the US. I'm proud because Indonesia did it three years before. US delegates accused India and China of not wanting to cut their emissions, so I just went to China and India and persuaded them to set a target without obligation. We should appreciate China as its forests are increasing. China plants more trees than anyone else cuts down.

Ok, there's a debate on the CBDR concept as it states that the Annex I countries should do more and the other countries should just do as much as they can, and this point is not 'good' for the US-Americans. However, the Durban Platform recognises that developing countries also contribute to the effort of combating climate change. But still, the US doesn't want to commit to anything.

RADJAWALI: What about adaptation to climate change?

WITOELAR: We have lots of vulnerable communities due to the changing climate. They need help and support to adapt to climate change, so adaptation is very important. Indonesia is proud to have historically been part of the initiatives of what is now called the *Adaptation Fund*, which hopefully will be realised in the coming months until the Doha meeting. Mitigation is intended to fight climate change although I think we cannot fight it, we can only delay it. Meanwhile, the vulnerable ones need to be taken care of by the system and national policies, so we are aware that adaptation efforts to climate change should not be reactive, they should be pro-active and should be prepared before it happens.

RADJAWALI: What do you think about capacity building, science, and doing research in the context of climate change?

⁵ COP refers to the *Conference of the Parties to the Convention*, in this case of the UNFCCC. The conferences are numbered consecutively. (ASEAS editorial note)

⁶ 1B1 and 1B2 refer to IPCC Source Categories of greenhouse gasses referred to by the Kyoto Protocol. 1B1 refers to fugitive emissions from solid fuels, i.e. coal mining, and 1B2 refers to fugitive emissions from oil and gas. (ASEAS editorial note)

WITOELAR: It's important because this is what climate is about, we rely on science, we rely on IPCC reports to formulate actions, otherwise it all remains highly subjective. As you know, basic research and research in general need lots of money while in Indonesia the allocation is not sufficient at all. So in the National Council on Climate Change we have our working group which focuses on research led by Dr. Agus Supangat.

PLITSCHKA: You mentioned the moratorium [on logging]. I have read a lot about the moratorium, mostly critiques regarding loopholes in the moratorium and so forth. What's your opinion on such criticism?

WITOELAR: I accept such criticism with an open mind. Some of it is correct. But some of it is wrong, for example the one by Norway⁷. And Norway apologised for that. The idea of the moratorium is to pass a moratorium law on the executable areas – not in all areas. So it applies to the areas with logging operations. You have to make sure that you can enforce it. Where is it? In the tropical rain forest and in the heart of Borneo, it's possible to do it there. If there's any criticism on the moratorium area that is being planted, it's a serious problem, please give us the data and I'll go to the Minister of Forestry to take action.

PLITSCHKA: It sounds like you are not too happy with the moratorium?

WITOELAR: No, we should do more, and do it more intensively.

PLITSCHKA & RADJAWALI: Thank you for this interview!

⁷ Norway's Minister of the Environment, Bard Vegar Solhjell, stated in an interview with Reuters in May 2012 that Indonesia's progress in reforming its forestry sector would be insufficient to meet its pledge to cut carbon emissions by 26 percent by 2020. (ASEAS editorial note)